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ABSTRACT

According to an evaluation symposium, the David Thompson University Centre (University of Victoria) pilot program in rural education, which includes a 14-week early field experience designed to help education students understand the relationship between rural communities and their schools, is "substantial and outstanding." Faculty, students, field sponsors, and university and provisional education officials meeting to examine the program called for program stabilization beginning in 1983-84 in organization, pedagogy, and experience. Specifically, participants recommended maintaining the programs's size and field experience but improving the faculty balance between field and academic professionals, increasing professional development opportunities, developing long-range backing and funding, and improving public relations. Recognizing the problem of maintaining the quality of graduates during stabilization, participants recommended student preparation for rural living and enhancement of personal and professional skills. They also recommended strengthening the curriculum by developing students' abilities in organization, professional attitudes, and awareness of the characteristics of effective schools, and by instructing students in lesson planning, unit planning for multigraded classrooms, professional ethics, and current research. Finally, the program should provide students with both internal experiences (such as lack of privacy, job relief, or job security) and external experiences (such as climate, remoteness, and resource sparsity). (SB)

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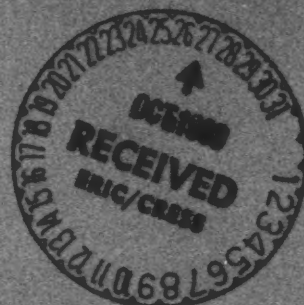
SUMMARY OF THE
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June, 1983

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RURAL STUDIES IN TEACHER EDUCATION:
FROM INNOVATION TO STABILIZATION

SUMMARY OF THE
SYMPOSIUM ON RURAL EDUCATION
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June, 1983

INTRODUCTION

Why do we do what we do? Does it work? Is it worthwhile? How can we improve? These are all questions which different organizations ask themselves. Evaluation and assessment are loaded words in this time of tight budgets and increased expectations for schools. There are a number of ways to measure the success of programs, perhaps the most well known of which is the provincially-mandated secondary school accreditation teams. David Thompson University Centre, Nelson, British Columbia, chose the somewhat unique format of a three-day symposium in the spring of 1983 to evaluate its pilot program in Rural Education.

The actual formation of a pilot program in Rural Education resulted from research compiled by Dr. William Cross, University of Victoria, who spearheaded the Cross, Bandy, Gleadow Report, 1981. For many years Dr. Cross travelled as a student supervisor to interior and northern British Columbia communities. He was struck by the inadequacy of traditional teacher education programs in preparing future teachers for rural teaching assignments. Some of the unique problems and challenges faced by teachers in rural settings include:

1. a sense of loneliness and isolation;
2. the necessity to deal with minority cultures;
3. a close interaction between school and community;
4. inclement weather conditions and transportation difficulties;

5. a need for versatility and resourcefulness, e.g., special training in drama, art, music, and physical education;
6. difficulty in establishing regular communication with peers and district staff;
7. inadequate and/or slow resource services;
8. a lack of support in dealing with special needs children;
9. a need for counselling skills (both student and adult);
10. inappropriate curriculum materials demonstrating little relationship to students' personal experiences;
11. a lack of personal privacy;
12. a need for classroom management strategies in multi-graded classrooms;
13. a heavy supervision load with no relief;
14. an uncertainty in teaching assignment due to possible closure of smaller schools.

Dr. Cross recognized that if these problems could be minimized by making changes in the traditional teacher education programs, and if teachers were better prepared for all aspects of life in a rural community, it could reduce the high teacher turnover in rural districts and provide continuity of educational growth for students and teachers.

Despite what may seem to be extraordinary obstacles, there is a quality of life experienced by rural people that cannot be found in an urban setting.

David Thompson University Centre (D.T.U.C.) was chosen for a pilot program because the University of Victoria already had a small elementary education program in operation at the Centre and there are a number

of rural schools throughout the Kootenays which could be used for the early field experience.

THE PILOT PROGRAM

The early field experience was a fourteen-week period of time in the second semester of the education students' third year. During this time, students first completed two community studies, then three school-based activities, and finally two class-based activities. Each community study involved student research into physical and human resources available in the area, transportation problems and political realities pertaining to that community. The school-based activities provided an opportunity for students to plan and implement an extra-curricular activity involving different age groups, e.g., cross-country skiing, orienteering, drama, school newspaper, puppet-making, etc. Each class-based activity followed the more traditional experiences whereby the student teacher worked under the direction of a sponsor teacher in one classroom and planned a unit of work in a subject area, e.g., language arts (poetry, fables). At this time students also presented teacher-prepared lessons up to a maximum time of forty percent.

The goal was to give the students a broad school and district experience so they might understand the relationship of the community to the school and how these structures can be supportive of one another. The dilemma was how to offer these early field experiences to the students and still allow them to complete their electives and other course

requirements on campus. Each early field experience activity resulted in eight days in the field out of a two-week period and two days on campus for course requirements and seminars.

SYMPOSIUM ON RURAL EDUCATION

The early field experience pilot program was an educational experience for students in British Columbia. The faculty felt it imperative to examine the program as it was being offered and recognized the possible limitations of their own perceptions. To gain a broader perspective, the composition of the symposium was designed to include representatives of the various interest groups or "shareholders" in rural education. The major interest groups involved were education faculty members at David Thompson University Centre who would describe the goals and objectives of the rural education program; early field experience (E.F.E.) students who were enrolled in the third-year education program and who would relate actual experiences and feelings throughout the program; sponsor teachers of E.F.E. students who would provide their own perspectives of what they saw taking place; and six discussants and one researcher (Appendix I) whose job it was to listen to each individual's presentation and then comment on and make recommendations regarding the value and effectiveness of the program in its present form. Also in attendance were student representatives from David Thompson University Centre's Post-Degree Professional Program. These students were enrolled in the fifth-year education program and they were to relate

their perceptions of the third-year pilot program and disclose its effect on their own experiences throughout the year.

The discussants (see Appendix I) included a historian and researcher of rural education in British Columbia; the Associate Dean elect of Education of the University of Victoria; the Executive Director, Teacher Services and Research Division, from the Ministry of Education; the President of the Rural Teachers' Association; Chairman of a northern school district representing the B.C. School Trustees Association; a rural Superintendent of Schools; and a researcher and organizational theorist from Washington State University.

The format was not one of a conference or workshop, but a symposium in which those included were invited guests. The participants were chosen for their involvement and interest in rural education to provide an arena for discussion, sharing of ideas and feedback on the relevance of the rural education program at David Thompson University Centre. The results of the symposium were compiled and used for guidance by the D.T.U.C. faculty in developing and modifying the program. The symposium was an opportunity for education students to discuss their experiences in the program, to reflect on the value of those experiences, and to make recommendations for the future. It was also an opportunity for selected, experienced rural teachers, representing districts used in the early field experience, to provide their analysis of whether in fact the program was meeting the needs of rural teachers. The discussant's role was that of evaluation. The sharing of such information was a valuable process to make the "shareholders" aware of what was intended to be accomplished

and what was actually accomplished, as well as the problems inherent in a pilot program. Information of this nature would prove invaluable in considering goals and objectives, needs and concerns for future programs.

A basic consideration underlying the evaluation process was whether initial goals had been met and if the achievement of these goals would adequately prepare students for rural teaching assignments.

Following an intensive day of individual testimonials and responses, the symposium concluded with many observations and recommendations. For this program to move from its innovative status and build upon its strengths, there are many factors that need to be recognized and considered. These suggestions, as listed below, deal with the quality, stability, format and the evaluation process itself.

SUGGESTIONS FROM DISCUSSANTS AND PARTICIPANTS

CHARACTERISTICS OF A QUALITY RURAL PROGRAM

To maintain the quality of the early field experience program, the faculty should:

1. emphasize preparation for multi-graded classrooms;
2. emphasize process of learning rather than content of subject matter;
3. provide a variety of experiences during preservice, e.g., learning assistance;
4. provide instruction in the use of audio-visual materials;
5. maintain small classes;
6. increase instruction in lesson planning, daybook, register, etc.;

7. maintain adaptability and flexibility of program;
8. stress the awareness of skills needed by a rural teacher;
9. incorporate research findings of effective schools;
10. stress the importance of integrating the curriculum and assessment procedures;
11. maintain an extended early field experience as research supports extensive field experience;
12. maintain the high expectations and demands placed on student teachers;
13. continue to meet the challenge of maintaining vitality in the program as well as building program stability;
14. incorporate drama into the core program;
15. focus on the organizational and transportation problems of providing extra-curricular activities for rural schools;
16. maintain rural teaching experiences in preservice training;
17. provide an awareness of professional attitudes (code of ethics, dress, etc.);
18. provide an awareness of the role of a teacher in the eyes of a rural community;
19. maintain the commitment and dedication of faculty.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A STABLE PROGRAM

To ensure stability of the early field experience program, the University Centre should:

1. include a balance of practitioners and academics on the faculty;
2. equate faculty qualifications, expectations and rewards with those of other universities;

3. partake in professional development experiences available to faculty;
4. expect a commitment to the faculty and program by the University Centre;
5. develop a long-range perspective;
6. address the problem of program fragility due to a lack of institutional and provincial commitment;
7. increase the number of faculty to maintain and maximize the effectiveness of the program;
8. secure adequate funding for the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

To provide a suitable format for the early field experience program, the faculty should:

1. allow more time for reflection and assimilation;
2. use a team approach to supervision of students;
3. reconsider the sequencing of community-, school- and class-based activities;
4. consider reducing the time allotted to community experiences;
5. continue the team approach of partners working together throughout their field experiences;
6. provide more direction to E.F.E. students in their school-based activities;
7. increase supervision of E.F.E. students;
8. provide students with an awareness of costs, transportation and accommodation requirements;
9. maintain the emphasis on the early field experiences rather than the traditional classroom-centered focus of other institutions;
10. increase personal contact between faculty and schools and decrease amount of packaged material.

SUBSTANTIAL AND OUTSTANDING

The overall observation of the researcher and discussants at the symposium was that the quality of the Rural Studies Program was "substantial and outstanding". Geoff Tagg, Superintendent of Schools, School District No. 4, commented "I believe you should keep one fundamental question before you at all times. What does the rural teacher need in terms of skills, attitudes, personal qualities, resources, support, to meet the challenge of the rural school effectively? If you can answer it, success is assured." The faculty is committed to addressing this question.

Part of the success of the program has been the openness and flexibility of those involved and the willingness to continually ask the questions "Why do we do what we do?" "Does it work?" "Is it worthwhile?" "How can we improve?" The challenge is to maintain the energy and vitality associated with innovation while at the same time gaining the support of the students, faculty, and "shareholders" to the early field experience, the potential looks bright for the Rural Studies Program at David Thompson University Centre.

IMPLICATIONS

It is not without a degree of trepidation and fear that a program opens itself to inspection by its clients and colleagues. The reality that the outcome inevitably means future change is sobering. This, particularly after an intensive two-year period of creative innovation,

is not readily sought by the program's faculty. The program is immature organizationally. It has not stabilized, but must, before substantive future changes are considered. The discussants have considered the presented data and have determined the program to be outstanding in quality but urge the faculty to carefully modify it over the next two or three years. Intensive innovation during this period may only serve to increase the program's fragility. Therefore, stabilizing structures must be deliberately put in place beginning 1983-84.

Such structures may be identified from the data presented during the symposium. Stabilizing structures fall into three categories: (1) Organizational; (2) Pedagogical; (3) Experiential. Organizational structures tend to be more administrative and hence require policy or regulation changes. Examples may include timetabling or contractual innovations. Pedagogical structures relate to academic domains. Many data fall in the area of pedagogy. Some examples may be a need for greater emphasis upon developing strategies of teaching in multi-graded class situations, or an incorporation of research findings of effective schools in teaching schema. Experiential structures tend to be field based. Many data fall in this area and unless student teachers actually experience needs, internalization is not highly successful. An example of experiential structures might be an exposure to a rural teacher's lack of personal privacy. Experiencing this phenomenon may be more effective than talking about it, for implications become more apparent if one is personally confronted.

After distinguishing data among the three categories (Organizational, Pedagogical and Experiential), faculty may rank items from innovations most needed to provide stability, to least needed in each category.

Organizational innovations may be planned by the program administrator and through the Dean's Office; pedagogical innovations through an academic change process; and experiential changes may be routed through the Early Field Experience faculty and program administration. Many items overlap both pedagogical and experiential categories. In this instance, the sequence generally begins with pedagogical structure leading to experiential structure innovations.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Moving a program from a period of intense innovation to a period of stabilization requires maintaining aspects of the program deemed excellent while improving de-stabilizing components. Many aspects of the program to be maintained were viewed as excellent by the discussant group (Appendix II). Two areas may be identified: Size of Program and the Program Experiences. Maintaining the smallness of the program enables flexibility, personal interaction, vitality and commitment of those involved. Field experiences within the program should retain a rural-based sociological emphasis and be offered over an extended duration of at least four months. Students should continue to work in teams throughout their field experiences.

Areas requiring improvement which may help stabilize the program were also identified (Appendix III). These areas may be classified under Faculty and Programming. Stabilization will be enhanced if the

faculty work under conditions which more closely emulate the traditional university model. This will occur if the composition of faculty is balanced between field and academic professionals whose qualifications and workloads equal those of other similar faculties.

The organization shall also develop a greater maturity as reflected in the programming. This will occur as the program develops a long-range perspective and builds institutional backing and funding commitment. In addition, the program needs to develop greater and more effective public relations. Faculty should become more committed to programming as their expertise in rural studies increases, indicating a need for faculty to experience more specific professional development opportunities.

The organization should develop a scope and sequence within its programming which promotes stability. Criteria for such a program scope and sequence may include team field supervision, restructured field activities, improved time allocations and more effective school-based formats.

In summation, some organizational structures should be maintained, particularly relating to program size and a program component which provides field experiences. Some should be improved, such as aspects involving faculty and specific programming configurations. The Rural Studies Program will begin its stabilization period given these conditions. It will continue to stabilize when further initiatives are made to sustain the existing program. Such initiatives will require innovation in both the Pedagogical and Experiential Structures.

PEDAGOGICAL AND EXPERIENTIAL STRUCTURES

During the process of stabilization, many concerns exist which will affect quality of the program's graduating teacher (Appendix IV). The importance of maintaining, if not improving, the quality of graduates from the program during the period of stabilization cannot be overstated. To do this, the discussants made recommendations which may be viewed under the categories of the graduate's preparation for rural living conditions, and his/her range of effective personal and professional skills.

The program should continue to emphasize activities and experiences which prepare teachers to live in rural areas. Prospective rural teachers need to understand the psychological effects of loneliness and isolation and have experience dealing with them. They should understand the nature of interaction and dependencies between the community and the teacher, and the community and the school. The vulnerability of these interactions should be understood and experienced.

The program needs to continue to expand the effective range of personal and professional skills which will be called upon in rural teaching situations. Teachers should be resourceful, effectively dealing with minorities, special needs students, multi-grade circumstances in light of integrating an inappropriate curriculum or classroom management. Teachers should be able to cope with many physical limitations yet offer effective curricular and extra-curricular experiences for the children.

The list is not exhaustive, for each rural community has unique needs, and in reality it is limitless. However, the Rural Studies

Program should ensure that its graduates have special qualities most successful rural teachers have--a zest for life and a vast capacity for resourcefulness and flexibility to face it. Such qualities cannot easily be taught without an extensive experiential base supporting the theory. There are other qualities, however, which may be taught without need for immediate reinforcement. These will be considered next under Pedagogical Structures.

PEDAGOGICAL STRUCTURES

To continue the stabilization process of the Rural Studies Program, initiatives should be made to strengthen the existing curriculum and instruction courses (Appendix V). This may be achieved by building themes in courses which support student teacher development of organizational abilities, professional attitudes, and awareness of characteristics of effective schools, group processes in the classroom, and a wide range of sociological issues which pertain to rural education.

Organizational abilities may be addressed in C and I courses if instruction is given in lesson planning, daybooks and unit planning for multi-graded classroom situations incorporating grades 1-7. Professional ethics must be thematic throughout C and I courses, too. Regular involvement of Teacher Federation personnel, School Trustees Association personnel and Ministry of Education personnel may serve this purpose.

Current research findings should be continually incorporated in all courses. Rural sociologists have turned attention to the school and its role in developing rural communities. Also, much work has been completed in the development of profiles of effective schools. Recent work has

pointed out that rural children tend to interact in group situations less effectively than urban children. It is incumbent upon the program's faculty to review the literature in this area and determine implications of such findings on the Rural Studies Program.

There is a need, then, for time and opportunity provisions. The faculty must be provided time to maintain currency with their fields of endeavour and opportunities need to be arranged to interact with colleagues in the field in order that, pedagogically, the Rural Studies Program is near the forefront of the field of teacher education.

Finally, the program must consider recommendations presented at the symposium which may be implemented through Experiential Structure changes.

EXPERIENTIAL STRUCTURES

Stabilization of the Rural Studies Program may be increased if Experiential Structure changes were implemented. Rural teachers may be better prepared for a teaching position if they experience rural life during preservice training. This was addressed by the discussants during the symposium (Appendix VI). The items discussed may be placed into two categories: External and Internal.

The program should provide actual "external" experiences. Student teachers should have experience with the climate as it affects rural communities. Winter conditions or rain forest conditions have impact upon busing schedules, the actual delivery of curriculum, free play time for students and even the overall educational climate of the school.

Remoteness of the school effects the ease of communication with the community, the school district and the world at large. Telephones

are often radio telephones. The open air channels provide a lack of privacy during conversations. Postal service is not scheduled daily, and the community is often spread out over hundreds of square miles. Thus teachers may have difficulty contacting parents of students or even support personnel in the school district system. Communication with the outside world is also sporadic. Postal service, radio stations and television networks are stretched to their limits because of the vast distances involved. Thus news and entertainment features are often reduced to a minimum.

Sparsity of resources is another factor of the external category. Student teachers should experience this in order to understand that to obtain lesson aids or other classroom resources one must order well in advance, and this requires planning. As well, they must experience the impact of being on their own, for few support personnel are available. Community resources are precious, because there are so few, and even then, they are often far away. Manufacturing or service companies are scarce, more so than resource companies. Thus a social studies unit, for example, might be developed around the availability of community resources.

The internal category includes three issues. The first, personal privacy, is one that student teachers should experience. The lack of personal privacy results most often because of the high profile the community grants the rural teacher. The community often sees the teacher, while not a true member of the community, as a resource for the community to use. Thus many implications may arise because of this fact.

The second category, "no relief in sight," is frequently not considered. Rural teachers are often alone. Thus school operations depend upon the rural teacher and supervision of students begins the moment the first child arrives and ends when the last child leaves. Student teachers should experience what it means when there is no relief in extra duties.

The third and last, job security, is another issue. The Rural Studies Program should provide student teachers with the experience of how vulnerable a small rural school is to closure during budget time. Rural teachers are aware of enrolment limits and of the fragile arrangement in which the school exists. The impact of this issue is pervasive, for each year the teacher exhibits behaviours which help cope with the situation. These behaviours affect all aspects of the job.

CONCLUSION

The Rural Studies Program ought to become stable. It will change so that its continuity is predictable. The faculty is prepared to focus its energy on developing stabilizing structures and to accumulate the necessary expertise thus establishing a credible body of knowledge in rural education. When educational colleagues recognize the excellence which exists in the program and acknowledge its value, the Rural Studies Program will finally be on the path to success and stability.

APPENDIX I

EVALUATORS AT SYMPOSIUM ON RURAL EDUCATION

Discussants:

Chairman: Dr. William Cross, Director of Professional Studies,
University of Victoria

Mr. Wilf Chelle, Chairman of the Board, School District No. 60
(Fort St. John), representing B.C. School Trustees Association

Dr. Russ Leskiw, Executive Director, Teacher Services and Research
Division, Ministry of Education

Ms. Kathy Muirvahill, President, Rural Teachers' Association, repre-
senting B.C. Teachers' Federation

Mr. Geoff Tagg, Superintendent of Schools, School District No. 4
(Windermere), representing Superintendents' Association

Dr. R. L. (Dick) Williams, Associate Professor, University of
Victoria, representing the Dean's Office

Researcher:

Dr. Don Reed, Professor, Washington State University, Sociology
and Rural Education

APPENDIX II

ITEMS RELATING TO ORGANIZATIONAL
STRUCTURES TO BE MAINTAINED

- maintain small classes
- maintain adaptability and flexibility of program
- maintain an extended early field experience
- maintain high expectations and demands placed on student teachers
- maintain program vitality when building stability
- maintain rural, teaching experiences
- maintain commitment and dedication of faculty
- continue the team approach of partners working together throughout their early field experience
- maintain emphasis on early field experience rather than the traditional classroom-centered focus

APPENDIX III
ITEMS RELATING TO ORGANIZATIONAL
STRUCTURES TO BE CHANGED

- incorporate drama into the core program
- provide a balance of practitioners and academics on faculty
- equate faculty qualifications with those of other universities
- partake in professional development experiences available to faculty
- expect a commitment to the faculty and program by the University Centre
- develop a long-range perspective
- address the problem of program fragility which is due to a lack of institutional backing
- increase the number of faculty to maintain and maximize the effectiveness of the program
- secure funding for the program
- allow more time for reflection and assimilation
- use a team approach to supervision of students
- reconsider the sequencing of community-, school- and class-based activities
- reconsider the time allotted to community experiences
- provide more direction to early field experience students in their school-based activities
- increase supervision of early field experience students
- provide students information concerning early field experience costs
- increase personal contact between faculty and schools and decrease amount of written materials

APPENDIX IV
ITEMS RELATING TO PEDAGOGICAL
STRUCTURES AND EXPERIENTIAL STRUCTURES

- a sense of loneliness and isolation
- an ability to deal with minority cultures
- very close interaction between school and community
- a need for versatility and resourcefulness
- a lack of support in dealing with special needs children
- a need for counselling skills
- inappropriate curriculum material
- multi-graded classroom management skills
- a need for emphasis of process rather than product
- a need to teach more audio-visual media techniques
- a need to emphasize that rural teachers must possess many skills
- stress the importance of integrating curriculum and assessment procedures
- problems providing extra-curricular activities in rural schools

APPENDIX V

ITEMS RELATING TO PEDAGOGICAL STRUCTURES

- increase instruction in lesson planning, daybook, register, etc.
- incorporate research findings of effective schools
- provide an awareness of professional attitudes
- provide an awareness of the role of a teacher in the eyes of a rural community

APPENDIX VI

ITEMS RELATING TO EXPERIENTIAL STRUCTURES

- inclement weather conditions and transportation difficulties
- difficulty in communication with peers and district staff
- inadequate and/or slow resource services
- a lack of personal privacy
- heavy supervision load with no relief
- an uncertainty in teaching assignment due to possible closure of smaller schools
- a need to provide a variety of experiences during preservice